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Gullah Digital Archive
Interviewee: Jonathan Brown
Location: St. Helena Island, South Carolina
Date: July 25, 2012

JB: ---that depends on who you're talking to. That is there are lotta little punks---kids, 'scuse me. Ooo, forgot you recordin' this thing. Lot a kids 'round here get in trouble. But, they're also bein'....what you call that word---

Unknown: Profiled, maybe?

JB: Profiled, exactly. You can't tell me if I'm walkin' down that road there, just because I don't live in this neighborhood you gonna pull over and stop me, why? That's a public road. And if I don't answer you right then you take me to jail 'cause you don't wanna hear what I got to say. That's what happens. So half these kids are going to jail they aren't supposed to be in jail.

Unknown: We're sitting here today, it's July 20---

JB: Fifth?

Unknown: 25th, uh with...

JB: Jonathan Brown.

Unknown: Jonathan Brown. We're sitting here on St. Helena Island at Benezette House [Penn Center Benezette House]. Will [you] start off by telling us your birthday and your childhood you can just----

JB: Wow.

Unknown: ---Go ahead and just start talking.

JB: When I was born here on the Island back then they didn't have hospitals so I was a house-born baby. Midwives, in 1955, I ain't gonna tell you what day, over on Lady's Island which is about six miles from here. And uh, raised by my Grandparents, I have---I knew my Mother's name, I knew my Mother, but can't tell you [who] my Father was. So I kinda, raised up pretty poor, you know, 'cause Mom, Grandmother, used to work on the farm feed, what, five or six of us of the grandkids she raised. So yeah, that's pretty much how my birth life was and after I graduated high school I went in the military. I didn't go in the military they drafted me in the military.

Unknown: Ok.

JB: And I stayed there twenty two years and then came back here.

Unknown: Could you talk about comin' up in uh, on Lady's Island; what type of work did your Grandmother do?

JB: They worked on the farm, Bishop Farm was a kinda---I remember the one big farm was on the Island which now has stop, um, and they would grow and they work on the farm sun up to sun down. They would, you know, they get back home---and it makes me mad, they work all week for a dollar twenty five, that would kill me. Life for me wasn't pleasant, I don't really talk about it much because we were very poor we were lucky if we had something to eat every day. But Momma found a way to make something out of nothing, ok. As you alluded to earlier, we talked about being raised on the Island. Going to school back on those days anybody raised you which was not a bad thing, today it is. Ok, um, those---these young people I can't tell them if they're doin' something wrong, them boys walking around with their pants on their butts you can't tell them to pull it up. If---they go and slap you then (shrugs). You wrong. Back in the day, "Yes, Sir" or "No, Sir---Ma'am", if you didn't do those things you got slapped real quick by any adult, it doesn't matter who it was. But that doesn't happen in today's society because time has changed. But the people haven't. So.

Unknown: Did your Grandmother take you to church as a child?

JB: Oh, we had to go to church, Sunday school and we had to walk. 'Cause we didn't have no car. My church is right down the street, Ebenezer's Church I joined, I no longer go there. I attend Brick right there now. But yeah we had to be at Sunday school, church used to be from nine in the morning to four in the afternoon. Four in the afternoon. So we spent a lot of time in church. So yes, everybody had to go to church. Momma didn't let nobody stay home.

Unknown: Were you baptized at Ebenezer?

JB: Yes.

Unknown: Did you have to go sleep, I lea---heard alot about people saying they had to go sleep?

JB: Alo---back then you did what your parents told you, ok. Now like I say, look back on life and say well was you saved, did you get saved, how did you get saved---I'm sorry something's biting me. Um, you didn't know what that was then 'cause you did what your parents told you, you just went to church and you stayed in church. So I was in everything she tell me I had to do I had to

do it. Junior usher, junior choir, you know, do all those things but transportation back then was slim very few blacks had automobiles. And we're talkin' the fifties and early sixties, and um so you just walked to church, you catch a ride back home you were good. Yeah.

Unknown: Wow. How 'bout elementary school did you have---was it integrated?

JB: No---

Unknown: Wh--- ok.

JB: No.

Unknown: Could you tell us about your schooling like, when you were very young, like elementary age?

JB: That was in the sixties. I started elementary in '61 over at St. Helena right here on the Island. Back then there were two black schools, St. Helena and Robert Smalls. Then you had Beaufort High which was all white. They is---they didn't integrated 'til the seventies. Well, in 1970 I was in the tenth grade and I went to Beaufort High. It was rough, it was the worst thing that could happen. But, to some people it was the best thing that could happen. And why I'm saying because even today, Beaufort county, it didn't change that much. It hasn't changed so much, to me, I can't speak for nobody else. It hasn't changed much for living conditions. It hasn't changed much for the way people are paid. It hasn't really changed much they just, put some, sugar coat it a little bit. To me it hasn't changed because when I lived here as a child I wanted to come back 'cause it was a pretty place. But I found out that the household medium here hasn't changed. It's still low, for blacks. And the indigenous island people, they still don't make what the other people make. So one to six we're here on St. Helena, St. Helena then I went to Lady's Island elementary, which was another black school right here, on the island. Everything south of Beaufort is called the Island. Even though it's Lady's Island, St. Helena Island. So I went to Lady's Island for two years, and then to the high school.

Unknown: Could you tell us anything about your Grandmother, like the life lessons she's taught you looking back?

JB: Yeah, that's a rough one because Mom---Mom[referring to Grandmother] was there for everything. She uh, she was---

Unknown: What was her name?

JB: Carrie Reynolds. Carrie Atkin Reynolds. She had four kids and my Mom was I think, I don't know, the baby of the four kids. And um, all I know was when my Mother left South Carolina and went to New York, I stayed here. And I was a hand baby that's all Momma would tell me. But when parents today try and explain life to children, we lived the life we didn't get any explaining to us we just lived it. And we um, we did what we had to do to survive. Um, so, Mom did a lot so when she---in her old age I gotta took care of her, I just flipped the script. Yeah.

Unknown: When you said did what we had to do to survive, could you explain that, about growing up in a situation where money was tight?

JB: Yeah. Um, well. Where we lived at you can actually look through the floor at night. Daytime, look through the walls, the house was just that bad a shape. And for her to be trying to make it with what we had it was hard. And it bothered me and still bother me to this day that she worked so hard for so little for so many. I'm not saying that the kids, that her kids that went away didn't help her out financially when they could but it's just that she had to struggle a lot. And I---that bothers me even today when I see older people. 'Cause I try to hang around a lot a older people these days just to listen some of things and hopefully some of the young people would. But they don't listen to old people anymore. And, when I said one meal a day, one meal a day was one meal a day. Ok, you gotta go to the neighbors' house and you know, "Hey go home we about to have dinner you need to go home". You know so, you know y'all can't spare a bone or somethin'. But that just how it was so I kinda went through it rough and I figure, it would be different later on in life. And it has been. So, I'm not gonna complain it's been rough and I'm pro---I'm happy for my Mom, my Grandmother what she went through and the people that touched my life, you know, like my Godfather who is now deceased he did a lot of male bonding with me. Um, this eighty five year old guy I deal with now he---me and him talk all the time, take him where he need to go and had a lot of unique experiences, yeah.

Unknown: Could you tell us about any---a couple of those unique experiences?

JB: Well, I'm the type of person that I like to do things. Once I got old enough I went on and I got a---he helped me to get, my Godfather, helped me to get my drivers license. Back in those days you could drive school buses. So I would drive a school bus and I when I get off that bus in the afternoon, I got a job working at a furniture delivery place in the afternoon. So my days were long and I'd take all that money, I'd give it to Momma. Ok and I wouldn't spend a dime of it 'cause no, she shouldn't have to work as hard for this anymore. So, he helped me in that aspect and when it come to, to give me that of the wherewithal to wanna work, work ethics. And dealing with the elderly people like I do, they tell you things that they went through in life and make you see how you should change your lifestyle now. And that's how I do it. One thing that happened, just a couple years back and to this day I don't know why I accepted it. But---the same eighty five year old gentleman knew this guy and he was dying of cancer. So him and his wife---

he wanted to see me, 'cause he quote on quote says he was my father. But I told my wife, I said no he can't be because I don't know these people and you can't wait fifty seven years to come back tell me you my Daddy.

Unknown: Right.

JB: Ok it just don't work for me. But anyway, I went to see the old guy and his wife, his wife was ninety something and he was eighty something and he asked me would I take care of them in their latter days. And I went back home and told the wife, and told her would she help me out. Well we did. Well he died six months later and she died two years later. But these were people we never knew, ok. So, if I was the type of person that would say ok, I'm not gonna do something for you because you done done me wrong, I would never have done that. Now if you do me wrong, right now I'm gonna say hello thank you and I'm done with you. Imma walk away I won't talk to you anymore other than hello. So my---people look at me like I'm strange but I look at people like they're who they are, ok. If you tell me that it's snowin' I'm looking and I don't see no snow, right then your credibility is done with me. Because you just lied, ok. But if you said you wanna go and walk on the moon, I'll say ok go ahead and walk. But you gotta be real. You know. That's just how I look at things.

Unknown: Could you tell us about answering the military, why you cho---

JB: Well, I didn't choose.

Unknown: You got drafted. And tell us about that experience.

JB: That was a crazy one because I was in the tenth grade and I came home from school and Mom had this letter. And the letter from the government, [she said] "open that letter boy I need to know what in there". I opened it up and [it said] "you have been inducted in the United States military report". I had to report two months later and that still had me still in high school. So I went down to the recruiting office in town and I told him I said, "I'm in the tenth grade. You guys want me to drop out of school to go to Vietnam". Guy said, "No, but when you graduate high school you got three days---ten working days to report". So I graduated May 30th, July the 3rd I was in boot camp. So from there I went straight to the military. The only good thing came out of that, they gave me an option what branch I wanted to go in. And I chose the navy. Because I said, I don't wanna sleep on the ground and I don't wanna be in the marines, 'cause marines are right across the creek here, and I said nope. So I chose the navy and I stayed twenty two years.

Unknown: What did you have---what was your basic training?

JB: In diesel mechanic, ok, there's no diesel there's just no way over here. But I chose that because it would give you, it gave us the it ga--- what my job was on the ship was to work at backup generators, operate the backup generator for the ship if the power went out. That's what I did. Um, looking back on it, it was a bad choice because it was hard to excel, ok. It back in the days racism in the military still existed, ok. Still existed. And it still today to a degree as well. Depends on whose side, or whose eyes you're looking at. So yeah. Do I regret it, no.

Unknown: What are some life lessons that you learned here on the Island to help prepare you for military service? Were you used to taking orders and following instructions?

JB: You have to on this Island because like I said before, if a grown-up tells you to sneeze you better sneeze. So taking orders was never a problem for me. I only problem I got with that is, don't tell me to do something and you're doing just the opposite. Ok, that's a problem I got and that's what I see happens a lot today, is people in authority is over-exert their authority and they'll tell you that to do something and then they're doing just the opposite. And I was like, you can't tell me anything you doin' just words. But then, you'll be stupid if you fall into that trend. So I'm something of a trend-setter, I don't follow trends that much, I set my own.

Unknown: Could you tell us how life here on the Island has changed, since coming back from military service?

JB: Comparing to what?

Unknown: Your childhood.

JB: Ok. Like I, we were talking offline, economically this Island hasn't changed. Economically for the natives, in my opinion. And I keep saying my opinion because as I work in certain committees on the county and certain leadership roles in this community, I still see the people, the natives, struggling. They all have to get up three, four clock in the morning to go to Hilton Head just to make minimum wage. And even though they're getting ten, eleven dollars an hour by the time they pay for transportation back they're making less than minimum wage. So they're really not making any money. When the average person can go right here, downtown, or work in the community for some of these people with money, don't make as much money. So that hasn't changed. The only place that fair pay on this Island, in this community, is the government, because everybody's paying on the same scale. Ninety percent of our government people don't even live here, never lived here they just moved here and lived---and now they got these high positions, get these big paychecks. And people that lived here, don't get it. The other problem I got with this community is the services just like the community thing they gonna go to, I think that's a crock of bull. Because the people pay the most taxes are the people that lives here. The people that comes here don't, and the services that they get are for the people that come here.

Uh, I'll give you a good example I was called a couple, maybe a year ago, right down the street 'cause a house was on fire. Now, how I got in that role I don't know. The house was only a mile from the fire department. But it burned down. How the hell a house gonna burn down that close to the firehouse? But, if one of these gated communities burn---gets a fire, they're there within seconds. Somethings wrong with that picture. As for crime, yeah we got a---these little young thugs are doing their thing. I don't have blame no one, I blame raisin' these kids for that. We give them too much, mine wasn't raised like that and they will never be and they thank me everyday 'cause I don't raise them like that. As for taxes and economics is just bad I'm gonna leave it like that because there's so many things I could say negative, but it would be a waste of time. Because it ain't gonna change and I couldn't change it by talking about it.

Unknown: How would you---what needs to be changed and in order for, what needs to happen in order for the economy to improve here?

JB: Equality. It's not equal. I don't know if y'all heard wherever y'all live at about the NAACP complaining about the flag on the statehouse, some years back. That was, in my opinion, the dumbest thing they could do that flag was some fo---maybe hundred and fifty feet up in the air nobody could even see it.

Unknown: Right.

JB: They started complaining guess where they put the flag at?

Unknown: Where?

JB: Right down on the ground in the front of the gate. So when you walk the state grounds it's right there. But then they turn around and then what they did they outsell confederate flag license plates. So what they did they just open up the racism all over again. When it was dyin' down and people was tryin' to get along. So all that, all that did open up---in my opinion, to me that was the dumbest thing they could've done. Left it alone. We all know it's there if you were observant enough you know it's at. Racism in this county, I can't say it don't exist but in my world it does. Back in my day, I couldn't get caught looking at the young lady. And we talkin' fifties, sixties I couldn't get caught lookin' at her. Because by then if some white guy saw me lookin' at her I would, I would catch it. I woulda got beat up killed or something and thrown on the side the road.

Unknown: You know of anybody that that's happened to?

JB: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Those the things you don't talk about 'cause people don't think that it happened. And when I---

Unknown: That's---we want you to talk about those things---

JB: Well, I'm not gonna call names and places I won't do that.

Unknown: We're just saying---

JB: Yeah but I know in my young days living on this Island it happened.

Unknown: Ok.

JB: Ok. Me and some fellows were talking just the other day about these guys dating, interracial couple. I said yeah, if they live back when we were young, they would thank us for that. Because now these, we got to the point that they don't look at race anymore they look at the heart of the person. Back when we were little even if me and (gestures at female interview) what's your I don't---

Unknown: Audrey.

JB: Me and Audrey was gettin' along and we wanted to go to the movies we couldn't do that back then. She would get scorn as well as I would. So it couldn't happen. But then nowadays they getting married they having children. So they need to--they look back on the days of old and say yeah, these people really went through some stuff. Just for th--so I can have the luxury to say I can date interracial. You know, so.

Unknown: You mentioned your leadership roles in the community, can you talk about some of those?

JB: Oh, wow I don't know, yeah I came back here in '94 out of the military. And kinda was bored, got involved with the community development center across the street and from there I started, I ended up on a couple of the county's committees. The comm---protecting overlake[?] committee, if you ever heard of that. It's a group of people that live in every aspect of this Island. And we are meeting to give county input, recommendation, as to what we feel is not fair living for the people of the island. Currently we are going through some changes where there about to change the codes and the people that we represent were given, in my opinion, false information from county. And there's a big divide between the county and the community, right now. That's why I said, I don't wanna even tend that thing with Tanner[?] because I think it's full of---it's a lot of fertilizer. And I don't---because when I moved here my house got broken in three times. And if I'm law enforcement you can pull me over for having a brand new vehicle and you gonna pull up behind me and run my license plate so, "Your plate don't match your vehicle". I said,

“Scuse me, you gonna pull me over ‘cause my plates don’t match my vehicle, but you can’t tell me who the hell broke in my house three times”. I got a problem with that. Do I look like I stole this vehicle? Who wrote the laws to say that you can transfer your plates from one vehicle to the other when you buy it. Black fools didn’t right it, ‘cause ain’t no black fools doin’ the writing around here. So those are the type of things that kinda irks me with some of the government issues around here, our leadership. Um, I was--I’m chairman, vice chairman now, I was chairman of the trustee board in my church and a vice chair at this church (points across the street). I serve as vice chair for the county disability and special needs advisory board, plus um, as you’ll see at [inaudible] I fill a lot of hats in that organization. And it’s because I have certain skills I guess. I don’t, I lead--people can tell a true leader if they want so I guess they see that in me.

Unknown: Could you talk about ha---when you were coming up as law enforcement, and---you brought it up, has it changed and have they always treated the people in the negative light? Or was it just recently or...?

JB: No, recently. In---In the new years, I actually remember, well I can’t say remember ‘cause you don’t know, back when I was in my early years, young boy, there probably ten, maybe eleven, cars on this entire Island. Ok, we had one cop, he might come over here every now and then we didn’t have crime, these doors would never be locked. You could anywhere you want and not have to close your house, ok. And if somebody, like those ladies walked across this ground, you would know they comin’ ‘cause they’ll say, “I’m going by”. That way they know somebody was on their property. Crime was not, I’m not gonna say it didn’t happen, but it wasn’t as high as it is now. Like I say, I got a bitter pill for law enforcement because I think they’re the biggest breakers of the rules, in my opinion. And they do have their good points, don’t get me wrong, ‘cause matter of fact, a very good friend of mine was a county sheriff and he got killed, right after he got in the military and it was kind of a setback. Yeah he got---at a stupid domestic violence stuff he killed, and so I have some good points about the police work and then I have some bad ones. And you’ll see tomorrow night or whatever that night is---

Unknown: Tonight.

JB: Tonight. The people that’s gonna talk are the elderlies, the ones who really have a problem with law enforcement. They beefed up---my wife got a girlfriend at work and after the second break in of my house. I had to tell him, please see what he can do to get somebody else to patrol my area little bit more. I can’t fence it in anymore I can’t put any more alarm system anymore, somebody knows he got a house that looks like this he got money so let me go tear it up. You can’t have anything in the black community before somebody wanna tear you down. And a lot of these people work hard, very hard to get what little they do have and that’s why I’m also an advocate of single parent, some of these young ladies they work hard to take care of their

families and these young thugs will just go in and take everything they got. And it just makes me mad. But you don't know who they are so you can't say nothing about them so you just gotta just try to work with the system to see who you can help.

Unknown: Well you were---another question I'd like to ask you is about, if I asked you do you classify yourself as Gullah? And what does Gullah mean to you? If so, what does it mean to you?

JB: Gullah is a culture. Um, and I have mixed feelings about that one too. As I said I was born and raised there, I can speak the language, I can act the culture, I can do everything that goes with. But once I um, I graduated, I left and anybody that talks to me on the outside this Island would never know I was from here. Because they'd say, "you don't have an accent, you don't have that dialect". I said, "No I'm sorry I don't". Ok, I ain't no better than anybody else but if I go in the community and there's a group forum going on with conversation, I'm right there with them. Ok, so. The culture is here to a degree. But it's changed and every time that question comes up me and Queen or me and Liz would get into a debate 'cause I don't agree with them. Because they say, oh w---...no it ain't. We lost it when we lost our property. We lost it when we lost our community. And how the sam hell did these people get here, somebody let them in. There was one way in and one way out, so now there's two way in and two way out. How did they get over here, ok. And then I have to blame, again, county, they tax you to death. If they wanted this property they'll tax them right out of there. There are people right now in this county getting taxed out of their property because somebody want it. It ain't fair. If I'm making seven hundred dollars a month off my social security and my property is value at a hundred thousand or a million, and Billy Bob comes from Ohio, seem to be the place that all these people coming from---and they want that property, well what happens. Well let's say---let's change the millage rate, let's increase the taxes. Well I'm only making this, I'm paying light, I'm paying water, I'm paying fire, I'm paying all these already. How can I afford this? Well, once your tax get to liquid then what happen? You lost it. This place right here is another sore spot for me because they started out something when I came out of the military and I was all for it. They would raise money to help people and that'd pay the taxes. What happened to that program, I have no clue. But we knew they don't want it to exist when they help anymore. There's a million dollar property right next to our church, 'kay. Now, who allowed a million dollar piece of property to go into a historical district in this community, somebody did. What they gonna do to the community? Nothing. Anybody else build a house anywhere near this community have to build a million dollar house. Is that fair to the people who can't even make a hundred thousand a year? No. And house was allowed in the historical district, but you can't paint the walls of a historical building other than the color they wanted but you allowed a million dollar building to go into. You don't see nothing wrong with that? Ok, do you see anything wrong with me building a business on my property. On my own property. But, if Billy Bob wanna build it he can build it in six months but it gonna take me ten years to get it done. Is that fair? Same county, same people just about who---who's applying for it. That's what I have an issue with.

Unknown: Have the churches of the community been able to help with that program fallen away, do the churches have resources to help people out?

JB: Yes and no. I can't speak for all churches 'cause I don't know what they do. I know that mo--the church that I currently go to, the one I did before, they don't do nothin' for nobody but themselves. I hate to say it negatively but, and that's why I left. The church that I currently go to they give away too much money. But then you get people that gonna use the system. And that in itself is bad, and the one that really needs the help don't get it. That burns me up as well, it's kinda hard to say and the situations can be different and it's a case by case basis too.

Unknown: Do you feel that uh, how do you feel about the people trying to re-develop this land? Taking it away and bringing in more modern, modern uh corporations or stores, do you see this becoming like Hilton Head?

JB: Yeah. It's slower and thank God to the group of people that I work with and deal with and some of the community people don't see it but we actually slowing down the process. Because if we don't say things or do certain things this place will be blowing up. Why I say that is simple. The latest incident was the family dollar store was the last fiasco between blacks and whites on this community. That guy caught holy hell to build that store, ok. But, you take that same situation and you go right up the street, there a lot of general dollars that opened up in a few months. But it took him years to build that store. And he's not the owner of the family dollar he's just rentin' out the building. What is happening, and that's another sore spot, is right down here on Land's End, there is a whole new community down there that people never knew of existed. The people down there can't even go in the water anymore. That's sad. Behind my Mom house, I bought this property from this family member. And because they thought I was taking this property from these people, this lady, at a low value. The family member said, "No we're not going to sell it to anyone". But they sold it to a white person, ok, for more money. Guess what, that's the same place everyone in the community went to go crabbin', go fishin', go swimmin'. They can't go anymore. Why? 'Cause the white guy gated off the road and said, "You can't come here no more". He has a right, but, it's an easement right in this county as well. So, if you give---and he has given easement to the creek, but where you gonna park at? You can't. The only place to park was where his property was. So that was taken away. Development is coming, we have one, two, three, four gated community now. And each one of these gated communities they have push people off their property. One that I like so well was right across the way here at Wallace, where they decided they gonna build on a graveyard. Graveyard are sacred to us. Churches are sacred to us. Just the other week with this new code the county got some rocket scientist out of California gonna draw a bicycle path through the churchyard. Are you crazy?! And the first thing the community did was blame the committee. No, we did not say that, we did recommend that. We had no knowledge that they were gonna do that, we took what y'all asked

for and said, "This is what they want, show us how it's gonna look when y'all re-write the code". That didn't happen, it didn't happen and it still hasn't happened. But I guarantee you that code is gonna get passed and we're gonna be caught with the short end of the stick. Guarantee. And I work with the committee and I know their style, how any government work. So, yeah.

[End clip 1]

[Begin clip 2]

JB: Yeah, I agree with you and that's one of the reasons why I'm still there. Like I said, the lady that got me involved with some of these county governments issues like this, always say to me and then she done and dropped out. You got---somebody gotta say something, I said, "Yeah you're right". But one man can't rule and a whole group can't change. I don't plan to drop up until my time is up. And we're only there for a certain number of years. But if I see what's happening, happen where they pass this farm-based code and what happen when they pass it, just like twenty one if y'all see that, that's fairly new. And they think they were doin' the community a favor, when that ain't what they asked for. So when they pass this farm-based code, they gonna tell me how to build my house, they gonna tell me how to build my---how my yard need to look. They gonna tell me---people right now who've been livin' here for years, if their car broke down in their front yard, they givin' them tickets, tell them they gotta move it. Ain't got no business on my property. I went down to county a year ago because I have a red pickup truck that I use to pull my lawnmower, it's a '79, runs, works fine. Well, they came and took a picture of it and tell me I had to get it out of my yard. I went down there and raised hell, "Who the hell told y'all to come on my property". I don't go in no white man's yard to tell him what to do, so what my truck in my backyard got to do with it and who allowed you. [They said], "Now we stood at the street and took a picture". I don't care, it's still on my property it ain't bothering nobody, ok. So these are some of the things that bugs me, so yeah I would stay just for that reason. I wanna see how this Lands End project gonna come out I wanna see how this farm-based gonna come out. And I know from what I'm hearing and what I read, it's not gonna be in the best interest of the community.

Unknown: In the past churches made a big part of change. Are the churches being involved now or do you think people need to get the churches more involved so that you can have a bigger voice because historically that's where we got our support from as African Americans was through the church?

JB: It would be great now don't get me wrong there's a few pastors on this Island that still gets involved. Um, and bring their flock with them but a lot of people sit back and want you to do it and they don't go--- "You done that to we". No we no, no you sat there you need to come out. I go to county council meeting every now and then when there's something about this Island.

Because I have a kinda hectic schedule sometime. And I'll sit there and I'll look around just to see the people that's being effected, where are they. They don't even come out and it's five o' clock in the afternoon. I understand you gotta work but if I know that they're gonna come in and they're gonna do something to my community, I think I wanna know firsthand what's going on. Or wait three days or three weeks when it comes back on the TV channel. So, that's one of the issues that I see but churches today in this community is not involved as it was back when I was a child. It's more like church I'm gonna leave it at that. And I'm not talkin' religious, it's more like church.

Unknown: When you were growing up did you stay on an heirs' property or large family estate or did you---

JB: No. Heirs' property, everything is pretty much heirs' property. I'm dealin' with some of that now for some people. Yeah, my Mom I---and when I say Mom I mean my Grandmother, ok.

Unknown: Right.

JB: I don't know how she did it or when she did it and I don't think I know when I was older I helped her go and help her get it divided so she could give it to all the children. But we---she had four acres right around where the family house is now but we don't live in like a family compound. My birth mother lived there for a while but she soon remarried and moved away then passed away. So there's only the single house there. So, no.

Unknown: Did you all farm---

JB: Oh, yeah.

Unknown: ---your land?

JB: Oh, yeah. We had a little butter beans and okra field in the front yard. Yeah, yeah, I mean I told you we---

Unknown: Could you talk to us about that?

JB: We didn't have much, we didn't have much to eat, ok. So, and that's another thing about the culture of old I like, if anybody farmed you could share in their growth. If you ever run over the adage if they, if the neighbor killed a pig you got a piece of meat, that's true. If they killed a hog or chicken you got a piece to cook. Because they shared back then. Farming is now gone away other than the big-time farmer. We have a couple of small farmers that tries, but they can't sell their product and they don't even try anymore. In fact this eighty five year old guy he used to do

‘til his health started failin’ him, farm lands and go to the market and sell his product. Matter of fact, Penn heritage weekend we’ll have vendors out here selling local products, greens, sugarcane. But Mom only did okra and butter beans. And um, I keep saying I’m gonna plant one too, and I never do, so. I just don’t have the time to sit there and cultivate but some people do plant gardens, yeah.

Unknown: How ‘bout fishin’ did you all---comin’ up did you go to the creek and---

JB: No, me personally, no.

Unknown: Ok.

JB: One of my uncles that owned a shrimp bait shop up the road and his son has taken over. And I used to like going out with him just to be on the river. Not to say I---I never had the interest for the water, especially after spending twenty two years in the navy, I don’t care to go back on the water, ok. But I do like go out with him---used to go out with him just to be on the water. So for me personally fishing was not a thing---now I love some fish. My brother in law goes out a lot, “Hey just bring me a couple back”. And he does, yeah.

Unknown: Another thing I learned about was like the baseball teams, was that big when you were comin’ up?

JB: That was great. Every community had a team. That was fun, we would fight to see who gonna go to the next one to play. That has went away, it gotten, gotten to be money, money, money and the camaraderie went out of baseball. ‘Cause every community had, we had our own church, we had our own praise house, we had our own baseball, we had our own little community. So, we would go to each community on a Saturday and play against each other so there was always a baseball game to go to on a Saturday.

Unknown: Could you tell us the names of the teams? If you can remember.

JB: Lord, you got to ask that question, didn’t you. No I can’t, I know the [inaudible] but they didn’t [inaudible] they try to play now, but they can’t get enough people to play. ‘Cause they don’t play anymore they just really there’s---unless it’s organized by county there’s very few baseball games or sports going on other than the school system.

Unknown: Was that the most popular sport on the Island?

JB: Baseball?

Unknown: Yeah, baseball.

JB: Hell, yeah. That was it. That was it. I'm tryin' to think there used to be a baseball field somewhere right in this neighborhood. But I can't remember exactly where it wa---I know there's one right there on Wallace. Yeah, and we had one right by our house and ever---like I said every Saturday we knew we had a baseball game. We had girls softball, we had, I mean it was a day of fun. You done worked all week, Saturday you get dressed and you go to the ball game.

Unknown: You mentioned that every community had a praise house, multiple churches or one church?

JB: No, one church.

Unknown: Ok. And a baseball team?

JB: Mostly a praise house is run by a church, by a member of a church. Like I say, I live six miles down the road, but we, most of our people came to Ebenezer. So, the deacon would be outta that church. And that's the person that would be the leader of your praise house. So I when I said the church, the church is actually ran by the praise house is actually under the leadership of that church. Right now we only know, I only know of two. And they're still open to the public but they don't have praise services. Like they used to. And those are right down here, at Eddings Point Road. But when they, when that elder rang that bell on Sunday evening you know it was time to go to praise house. And you stayed at praise house, you know the luxuries of air conditioning, and fans, and electric light wasn't there back in the fifties and sixties. You just dealt with the heat, ok. In the wintertime you were glad for that wood stove. But, these---like I say it's too modernized now and everybody done forgot how we got there. I was tellin' my grandkids which is only seven, about cellphone. When I was his age, there was no such thing as a cellphone. And I was telling grown folks just in 1985 there was no such thing as a cellphone. They couldn't do that, "What do you mean there wasn't a cellphone, cellphone's been around forever". No it hasn't.

Unknown: Could you talk to me about the service in the praise house? It was good. Camaraderie, closeness, [close]knit people. And I say that a lot because I wish those days were still here. Where people were real and people were for each other. When the elder called praise together, he's normally singin' by the time we get there. By the time everybody gets there, there's no use sittin' around, everybody joining in the praise of worship services. And it doesn't last forever but it lasts a long time it'd be up to two hours, three hours sometimes, then you go home. But back then remember there was no such thing as traffic, so everybody walked to where they wanted to go and there was footpath everywhere. And being where the praise house was the people had to

get home before the tide come in or they wouldn't be able to cross the sand. Well, we call it creek we call it sand 'cause the water leave the.... So it was a great worship experience. Back then those days of learning biblical things, and I find it amazing today where people are so gullible that they believe that what a pastor say is the truth. Back then, the pastor or the preacher was the only one that supposedly knew how to read. Today everybody know how to read. So if you tellin' me a fish story, I should be able to go in my bible and tell you, "No that ain't right". I don't see it that way. Not to debate the pastor, but to say, "Is he teaching me the right way". Ok, those days when elderly spoke, you listened. And they were concrete, ninety nine point nine percent they were on target. Nowadays, I don't see that I see a lot of pastors just in it for the money. And I don't think those pastors common sense some of them went, and now most of them are caught. So, but religion is still a heavy thing on this Island trust---don't get me wrong, there's one of them on every corner, more then---just like a liquor store, there's one on every corner. And not all of them have good members in them. And I always say, one I just had one big church, one big happy family then they spread up with all these little small churches and I understand why. Um, because that's the mother church of the Island and I, and I read the history and I said, ok they split up over some of the dumbest reason. And a friend of mine just a pastor the church, and they broke up, they split for the dumbest reason. So it happens. It happens. All because I don't like you. Will split up this church and make---raise hell, so.

Unknown: If that continues to happen, what do you think this Island's gonna look like in ten years, what do you think it is gonna feel like, twenty years, what do you think the future is here?

JB: As in relationship to economics to religion to culture?

Unknown: Who's gonna be here, are people gonna know their roots?

JB: No. I see that gone, I'm seeing that diminishing everyday. And I pray that it doesn't but as I say, the elderly is not dying off as fast as they used to, and as long as we got some elderlies that still remember it's gonna move on, continue on. But it takes the younger generation to wanna know it, wanna come back. Um, I came back again, like I said for a couple of reasons. One, Beaufort County used to be a beautiful county. They maintained the roads the streets used to be clean we didn't have all this crime, taxes wasn't as high. It was easy to live here then. In the seventeen years I been back all that has changed, three sixty, I mean just went crazy. The young people that do leave the county, they're not coming back because there's nothing here for them. If I can go to Hilton Head persee, and I'm gonna use that 'cause that's what a lot--- and make forty thousand a year doing one thing, and I can go to Beaufort and I'm only gonna make fifteen. There's a great disparity in that and that's exactly how this county is. When I came back, and I went to the civilian sector to work I applied for a job in Beaufort County and I looked at that guy, state job, and I-I wanted I just didn't curse him out and that was it. Now you sittin' back in your chair getting seventy, eighty, maybe a hundred thousand dollars a year. But you gonna tell

me as a black man in this county I don't need a job. But you asking me---you're hiring. I need to work. [He said], "Oh you're retired you don't need a job". 'Cause I retired from the military I don't need a job? What make you think that? Or you know what's in my pocket. So those are the mindset of some of the people in this county. Um, like I said before, most of the people in senior or higher-pay in this county don't even belong to---never came---never was born and raised here. Less than one percent is native. So it's always gonna be a disparity. I've asked some people, matter of fact I just came back from, uh God, I've been travelin' so much was it---Boston, Boston. And I was talking to this professor that used to live here. Say no way in hell they'll come back to Beaufort County. Because what they make as a teacher, as a professor there, they'll never get is from USCB. They'll never get that kind of money from TCL. So why come back to this county? Um, I had a young son work for Microsoft, make good money. They won't come back here because they know that they couldn't live here for what they make where they at, even though the cost of living may be high. And that was my mindset. The cost of living may be high in the big city but it's less in Beaufort county. Well, hell that's tip the scale now, yeah.

Unknown: When you were coming up, you mentioned the mob of pastors in the churches, were they from the Island or did they come from outside to come here to minister or were they like born and bred here?

JB: Yes and no. Yes and no. Like I said, there's a lot of churches on this Island and most of them the pastors came out of other churches. And some of them are home-grown but most of them did come from elsewhere. Just like when I went into church in the '63, the pastor was out of Savannah. The next one was out of Savannah. In my lifetime, none of them has been homegrown. Ok, [inaudible] has been homegrown but the pastor, pastor no. Um, the current church I'm in, I can't say I know too much about the history but I know that the last two pastors, three, were not natives of this Island. They came here from somewhere else, I'm thinkin' down the road here yeah, the last two, yeah, Pastor Williams, he's a native, and Pastor Wilson, he's a native. Yeah, so.

Unknown: Could you tell me about the role of the deacon because that's a title that I've been hearing a lot doin' these interviews and that's Deacon Johnson, Deacon Smith, you know? Things of that na---tell me the role did they have more power than the Pastor here?

Unknown: And what's the difference between a deacon and an elder?

Unknown: Right.

JB: Basically, a elder's like a...assistant to the deacon. Um, and that's how I...it's funny you ask that question 'cause I read a lot and um, being, like I said, I'm on the trustee board, the way

every church is set up is different. In most black churches the deacons are the leaders of the church.

Unknown: Ok.

JB: Because pastors are hired, hands, they come and go but a deacon never leaves. That is somewhat changed in some churches. The pastor now runs the church and the deacons, say yes to boss and go along. In some instances, it's a good thing because you got a good spiritual leader in some churches you got bad spiritual leaders. But if you allow the authority of your office to overwhelm, all your letting the ministry let somebody else take over then you got problems. And there's a couple of problem churches I know about. I been asked numerous times to become a deacon, and I've turned it down every time because the job is very responsible, there's a lot of responsibility that goes with it and I don't see a lot of the deacons that I know perform their job to the best of their abilities. I shouldn't wait 'til you are in Beaufort Memorial Hospital 'bout to have the plug pulled, to know you got sick. I shoulda been out in my community to know what's going on with you and you should be able to call me even if I can't get there. That don't happen. They are not re--proactive they are reactive, in my opinion, some of them. And like I told the chairman of the deacon board at my church, he asked me again, I said, "No". Because if I gotta do it, I need to spend more time in the community and the two jobs I have won't allow me to do that. So I can't do it for one, two until you straighten out some of these six you got here I ain't gonna be one of them, ok.

Unknown: So in, in your church are your deacons for life?

JB: Yeah. All deacons are for life. And I got a problem with that too, you shouldn't have no job for life. Ok, me I just got a problem with---and you can be a deacon if you want but should I be the chairman for life? No. I should give you a chance you might do a better job of leading the flock than me. Why should I want to be the same thing 'til I got told them, this a community overlay program. No my time's up now somebody else need to vote in and become chair. I can't--I shouldn't be the chair person the whole time. Let's s---somebody else take over because I don't wanna do no job for life. None.

Unknown: What are some of the songs that you remember you used to sing in the praise house?

JB: Oh, we still sing them in Brick today. Oh yeah. And I-I like that because it's still sing from the hymnals. And nothing wrong with new c---contemporary gospel, I don't knock those either I listen to satellite gospel, I listen to CDs. But it's hard because I could sit there and drive my truck I could be singing one and not even think about the name. It just come to me and I start singing then all of this time. So we do sing a lot of stuff, old spiritual in our church. Even the male choir we still sing from the hymnals.

Unknown: Um, is there anything else you would like to let the youth know? Some life lessons that you might want to tell them---

JB: So much.

Unknown: ---about the culture that you learned growing up here that may benefit them when they through their life?

JB: Yeah, I um. I'm gonna go back to a small story since you're talking about the youth. I started a youth program at the church, the first church before I left, and I got with a couple of the brothers and I said, "Look man. These kids are destroying themselves I need a couple of you to help me out". A couple a guys that had businesses, one was a roofer, one had---worked in a restaurant, and they agreed to work with me. So I got about fifteen young boys between the ages of nine and seventeen, and we met at the church every third wednesday and we would pick them up. The topic of our discussion was not about anything other than youth lef---life, life learning, what they're dealing with. The baggy pants, the tattoos, the piercing of the body, girls, pregnancy. When I did that, I wanted them to tell me what's going on in their mind. And it worked, it worked so well that that number went from fifteen to thirty six. Well it was working so good, the pastor had a problem with it. Well, his girlfriend did, in my opinion. 'Cause that's when it all went south. Well this dude with a girl, I said I don't know how to help a girl be a woman. I can help a boy be a man. I don't know what w---girls deal with. So, when I asked to do this, I asked for the boys, so if she wanna do the girls then go ahead. Well, her program wasn't working so mine couldn't work. So, that helped. Two days later, two of my boys got arrested, thrown in jail for stealing. And they'd never missed a meeting. Never missed one of my meeting. What I would tell the youth of today is: you gotta work for what you get because, and I---like I said I blame these parents, I'm so sick of mothers tellin' me 'Well I'm gonna give my child what I ain't had', well then let them go and work for it. I ain't had it either but I had to go and work for it. Make them earn it 'cause they won't earn a dime. Whine all the time, you gonna give them something. Most of these parents, their kids are wearing shoes that cost more than theirs and they work everyday. I got a problem with that. These young boys who walkin' around here with their drawers showin', these dreads, these baby-faced look like their thugs nothing wrong with culture, nothing wrong with dreads; fix yourself up. Be presentable. Don't give no one the opportunity to think that you out there ready to rob somebody, ok. Make yourself useful. I was at a church this past Sunday where there was so many little young people in there, I was happy to see it. It is weird for young boys to be in church. They be on the street goin', raisin' hell. Young girls showin' half their butt and all their chest out, come on. What are you savin' for your husband if you advertising everything today. I got a problem with that, ok. I got a problem, and everytime I see one---I say, I don't be needin' to see your butt crack, ok. Pull your pants up, you're a female. Why do you need to bend over and all your butt out, doesn't make sense, ok. That guy you want

make sure that he does want you, 'cause only thing he want is to get with you to be done with it. You guys who go around here they think---they got their chest out 'cause you a man 'cause went and got some girl pregnant. You ain't no man, you just a little punk tryin' to make it and that girl gonna catch hell tryin' to raise this child 'cause you're not gonna be there. You going---

[End clip 2]

[Begin clip 3]

Unknown: Is there anything else that you would like to share with us about your culture, what is m--- you know, I know you might not of---the Gullah question came up earlier, do you identify as being Gullah? You say that you are Gullah man? Because titles are very difficult.

JB: Very much so.

Unknown: I understand that.

JB: Very much so and a lot of people titleholders, I'm not one.

Unknown: Ok.

JB: Being born and bred in these sea island, yes. I consider myself to be Gullah. Do I look, carry, or act, no. Is it a choice I choose, no, it's just that I don't. Do I know the culture, do I know how to act and live the culture, of course, been there, done that. I'm no better than any native islander here. I just want more for my people, for these people, on this island. And the culture and the way of living like I say has gone. The last time we talked about culture on this Island when they the county was tellin' people can't have chickens in their yards can't have their cows and their horses. And I'm lookin', I said, this is what we, this is, the Island, this is the culture. What the heck you mean we can't have because somebody wanna build these communities. So yes, to answer your question would be yes I still, I think I am but people---

Unknown: Can you help just really pinpoint if it's possible we've had so many different answers to this question of what does Gullah mean to you and we understand the language, we understand the culture but how is the Gullah culture different than the culture outside of Savannah a hundred years ago? What's unique about this culture?

JB: Than the---because the Gullah people on this Island were more of a close-knit group of people. If you hurt, we all hurt. That has gone. Right now, my neighbor probably care less if my foot hurt, or I need a drink of water. That is not how I've been---that is not how the Gullah culture is. Our elderlies are taken care of. Our, our---we make sure that everybody has what they

need, we didn't have you---we against them mentality. Now we got it where, the culture is we don't even live off our land anymore. That was the key, we lived off the land. Th---the river, we farmed, we didn't have to go to the Piggly Wigglys and the Publixs to get nothin'. We all had---we had it all here, we raised our own animals. We can't do that no more to a degree. And some people are fighting just to keep that. Because of development. So, to say that what I think about when I think about the culture is, I'd rather that culture than the one we have currently. Any day of the week. I was in um, lot a places in the world but when I was in Saudi Arabia and when I was in Iran, we might think funny about the way they treat people, but they have a culture. We may not agree with the way they treat certain people in their culture but it works for them. The culture of this Island work for us because we didn't need outside interferences when they built those bridges that's when all start changin'. So I can live with the culture here, modern technology nobody is afraid of it but the culture is gone in my opinion.

Unknown: The bridge was it---when was it built when you were comin' up did they---

JB: When I was a child there was no bridge.

Unknown: Ok.

JB: Ok. In '64, in the '60 to '64 they build a wood memorial bridge. That what connected us to Beaufort. I knew of no one other than the adults that went to Beaufort and that was once a week or maybe once a month. And they had to row across to get to town, ok. When the bridge was born uh, built, people still didn't have cars. So if one person had a car they would pay a price and everybody go to town that wanna go and shop and come back. But then they didn't buy much other than shoes things that they couldn't make, they weren't making over here. But ninety percent of things were done here, homegrown, so it wasn't like it was they had to go to town, it was just they went. So when the bridge was done, that's when people started migrating to this Island.

Unknown: And what changes, what's the biggest change from when, prior to the bridge, what was the biggest change that you saw?

JB: In my lifetime when I left here, in, in '73 it all started changin' in the late '60s after Dr. King. death, it started changin' when integration started. That's when things started changing with the bridge. Integration was a hard pill to swallow for years um, and it still is to a degree because right now, in my opinion, I don't think these kids in school are learning nothing. Some of these teachers are just there to draw a check. Other say, "Why don't you get on the school board". No it ain't gonna do no good. Because it's all just a racket now. That changed, the culture changed because the people weren't as close as they used to be. They could spread out more. And once you spread out and you get new ideas, yeah you could bring them back but the

ideas got skewed to some degree. So a lot of things changed when the bridge came, ok, more people came into the community and the community started to change, the tax base has changed. Everything started changing, so yeah.

Unknown: So would you say it was a positive, the bridge being built?

JB: It has its advantages and disadvantages. And we're talking about maintaining a culture and every time I hear that I laugh because that's gone, in my opinion. To maintain a culture the bridge was not an asset.

Unknown: Right.

JB: Ok. If you ever heard of Daufuskie. Daufuskie was a beautiful place until somebody went over there and started building resort areas on it, ok. Now, we, the natives, used to go to Daufuskie to see those natives but that's stop. Now, they fought for years not to put a bridge over there but once that bridge go over there all those natives on Daufuskie is gonna catch hell. 'Cause just like they build at Hilton Head and pushed them out, they gonna build up Daufuskie and that pretty little Island gonna be another San Juan, Puerto Rico, that's just an example. It's gonna be a nice resort Island. But they're catching heck because boat shuttle don't work for everybody. So people don't wanna get on that boat and ride that forty-five minutes to Daufuskie Island. So yeah, that culture is still tryin' to hang on just like this one is. And, but, soon that bridge go in it's gonna go and soon as that bridge come in yeah five, ten years I might not see it, but it's gonna happen. I might not see this county but it's gonna be another Hilton Head. And it's fastly getting there, ok. And Hilton Head grew real fast because people just allowed themselves to sell off all their property or taxed them out of it, yeah.

Unknown: No more questions?

Unknown: Yeah, one more. How rapidly, talk about the history of the tax rates, what was the tax rate thirty years ago, what was it ten years ago, how quickly is it jumping by how much?

JB: I can only say from me being an adult because as a child I didn't know what they were paying, and I would be lyin'. But moving back---when I was a child, I said, I would live here because it was so cheap to live and I---the tax rate were very, you know, low. Since I moved back, when I built my house here my tax rate was marginally low, reasonably low, and every year it keep increasing. Right now my tax rate is almost as expensive as my house is, my property tax, and I'm payin' more for property tax than most people. And we all are, I'm not gonna say I am, but we are and we don't get the benefit of some of the taxes that we pay. And that's the bad part about it. I know in my seventeen years back here my taxes has doubled or more so that's moving back here, ok. But the services hasn't changed. You know, so.

Unknown: Well I would like to thank you.

JB: Alright.

Unknown: And once again today is July 20---

Unknown: Fifth.

Unknown: 25th, 2012. We just interviewed---

Unknown: Jonathan Brown.

Unknown: Mr. Jonathan Brown. Appreciate it.

JB: Alright----